

Eastern Illinois University The Keep

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ENG 4763-001: Advanced Fiction Writing

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ENGLISH 4763, Fall 2016

Advanced Fiction Writing

THURSDAYS 3:30 to 6:00

Coleman Hall 3159

Dr. Daiva Markelis/348-9230/dmmarkelis@eiu.edu

Office: Coleman Hall 3375

Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:00 to 12:00 and 2:00 to 4:00

Thursdays 11:00 to 12:00

Fridays 10:00 to 12:00

and by appointment

Purpose of the Course

Students will continue working on the elements of fiction, including narrative, character, and dialogue. We will read a variety of short stories in order to develop a language for talking about how fiction works. Several short writing exercises will be required. The major part of this course will be devoted to workshops; students will submit at least two short stories for class critique.

Catalog Description of the Course

Extensive practice in the writing and revising of prose fiction, with an emphasis on the development of the student's personal style. Each student will have the option of writing several short stories or one novella.

Objectives of the Course

Students will develop advanced ability and a repertoire of artistic strategies in the writing of literary fiction.

Students will deepen their understanding of fiction through intensive readings of contemporary authors.

Students will confront the various issues inherent in writing fiction: developing character, furthering action, and finding an appropriate personal voice.

Students will develop interpersonal skills and intellectual rigor through vigorous workshop participation.

Books

The Best American Short Stories 2015, edited by T.C. Boyle

Writing Fiction, by Gotham Writers' Workshop Faculty

Requirements

1. Write and revise three short stories or one novella/one short story. You may also attempt to write part of a novel, but you must see me beforehand about this option.
2. Read the assigned material by the assigned date and participate in class discussions and occasional in-class writing exercises. There may also be a few homework assignments.
3. Participate in workshops: 1) Submit at least two short stories or novel chapters for class critique;
4. Critique the work of classmates in an insightful and constructive manner, both orally and in writing.

5. Submit a portfolio of creative work at the end of the semester. The portfolio will include your short stories, novellas, and/or novel excerpts, including revisions. Your portfolio may also include in-class writing you've revised and typed up.

Additional Requirement for Graduate Students

Graduate students must write an additional story OR significantly add to an existing story or novella in order to produce a piece that is ready to be sent out for publication. Graduate students also have the option of writing a longer work for class instead of the short stories if they discuss this with me.

Grade Breakdown

Writing: 70%

Participation: 20%

Attendance: 10%

Writing Portfolio

In creative writing courses, grading is a necessary evil. Writers develop at their own pace, and teachers may be partial to certain styles or genres. I have found through experience that a specific grade on every written piece of work sometimes discourages writers. Often they look at the grade and skip the comments. Or, if their grade is a B, they ask themselves, "Why not an A?" However, students also have the right to know what they might expect at the end of the semester, grade-wise. I'll give you the option of having your individual essays graded, with the understanding that you can rewrite pieces to include in the final portfolio. Part of your grade will be determined by how thoughtfully you incorporate the suggestions of others as well as how well you develop your own inner writing critic. Final drafts of stories included in the portfolio must be free of grammatical and mechanical errors. Please visit the Writing Center if you need help with verb tense, sentence structure, comma use, etc.

Participation

Participation includes not only actively discussing the readings, but also making insightful and constructive comments on the writing of your peers. You must submit 2-4 typed paragraphs for every essay we workshop.

Attendance

Since the format of this class is primarily workshop, participation is extremely important. In addition, many of the ideas used in your essays will be generated in class discussions or in-class writing. I do allow for excused absences if they are properly documented. These include approved university activities and illness. Unexcused absences are pretty much all others—oversleeping, hangovers, finishing papers for other classes, out-of-town trips "because I'm homesick." More than one unexcused absence will lower your attendance grade by one grade.

University Policies

(1) Academic integrity - Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>) Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.

(2) Students with disabilities - If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (OSDS). All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Please stop by Ninth Street Hall, Room 2006, or call 217-581-6583.

(3) The Student Success Center - Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

Workshopping Procedure

A large part of this course will be devoted to the workshop, a popular method of critiquing creative writing. This is how it works: You make a copy of your piece for all class members and submit it to them the class period before workshopping. **(You may email the essay if you like, but it must be mailed out at least two days in advance. So, if your piece is workshopped on a Tuesday, you must email essays out by Sunday evening at the latest.)** In class you read the first 2-3 paragraphs of your essay out loud. Class members have a few minutes to look over their written comments. Class members discuss strengths and weaknesses while you remain silent. At the end of discussion you respond to the critique and have the option of asking for more feedback on specific sections that the class may have overlooked. Feel free to take notes on what is said in order to help you revise.

The idea of class critique makes some people nervous. You may feel uncomfortable at first. Over the course of the semester, however, you will begin to find the comments and suggestions of the class and the instructor invaluable.

Guidelines/policies for criticism:

- 1) We'll begin with a more general opinion of the work. Example: "My sense is that you're trying for a tone of ironic humor throughout the piece. I think that, for the most part, you've succeeded, though the ending seems too flippant." Or: "I like this piece, especially the dialogue, but feel that it's too long."

We'll then move on to more specific comments. Example: "There's a lot of repetition of the word 'interesting' in paragraph three." Or: "You have a tendency to overuse commas."

- 2) Be honest. False praise does not help the writer in any way and compromises your role as critic.
- 3) Criticism should not be mean-spirited or vengeful. And it goes without saying that sexist, racist, homophobic or otherwise inappropriate comments will not be tolerated.
- 4) When it comes to taking criticism, be open-minded, but remember that what you revise—what you leave in, add, leave out—is ultimately your decision. Some remarks will resonate more clearly than others for you.

NOTE: When you turn in a workshopped essay to me, please also submit all of the copies marked up by your fellow classmates, including the typed comments.

NOTE: I may make minor changes to this syllabus in order to suit the needs of the class. Changes will always be announced in advance.

FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE on Tuesday, December 13^h at 5PM, in my office

CLASS SCHEDULE

#1	08/25	Introduction/In-class writing
#2	09/01	READ the following from <i>Best Stories</i> : Laura Lee Smith, <i>Unsafe at Any Speed</i> , 31; Sarah Kokernot, <i>M & L</i> , 144 Maile Meloy, <i>Madame Lazarus</i> , 250 ALSO READ from <i>Writing Fiction</i> , Chapters 1, 2, and 3
#3	09/08	READ from <i>Best Stories</i> : Colum McCann, <i>Sh'khol</i> , 176 Joan Silber, <i>About My Aunt</i> , 274 Diane Cook, <i>Moving On</i> , 44 ALSO READ from <i>Writing Fiction</i> , Chapters 4 and 5
#4	09/15	Justin Bigos, <i>Fingerprints</i> , 22 Jess Walter, <i>Mr. Voice</i> , 33 ALSO READ from <i>Writing Fiction</i> , Chapters 6 and 7
#5	09/22	Workshop Read Chapter 8 from <i>Writing Fiction</i>
#6	09/29	Workshop Read Chapter 9 from <i>Writing Fiction</i>
#7	10/06	Workshop
#8	10/13	Workshop
#9	10/20	Workshop
#10	10/27	Workshop
#11	11/03	Workshop
#12	11/10	Workshop
#13	11/17	Workshop Read Chapter 10 from <i>Writing Fiction</i>

THANKSGIVING BREAK WEEK

#14	12/01	Workshop
#15	12/08	Workshop Read Chapter 11 from <i>Writing Fiction</i>